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SUBJECT: POLITICAL PARTIES CONFERENCE FOCUSES ON KEY THEMES
OF PARTICIPATION, UNITY AND SECURITY

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Classified By: Political Counselor Margaret Scobey for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d)

11. (C) Summary. The Ministry of State for Reconciliation and National Dialogue hosted the much anticipated political parties conference December 16-17 in Baghdad. The GOI intends for this conference to be one in a series of political party conferences although future dates have not been announced. Approximately 250 people attended including ministers, parliamentarians, provincial governors and political party leaders. Opposition leaders had been invited to attend, but their presence was minimal. The Prime Minister and other senior GOI officials opened the conference with speeches focused on political participation, national unity and improving security.

12. (C) Summary cont. The speeches welcomed former Baath party members into the political process as long they demonstrated loyalty to the national unity government and did not "have blood on their hands." The Prime Minister welcomed former Iraqi Army (IA) members of any rank back into Iraqi Security forces or government agencies. Those who cannot be reinstated will be given pensions, regardless of their former rank, the PM said, as long as they did not commit crimes. Attendees later divided into working groups to discuss and make recommendations on the following topics: federalism and constitutional review; Iraqi security forces and militias; De-Baathification; and expanding political participation. These committees reconvened December 17 and presented recommendations to the Prime Minister and Council of Representatives (CoR) for implementation. Iraqis throughout the country welcomed the supported the conference's goals although many expressed doubts that the final recommendations will be implemented. End Summary

WHO WASN'T THERE: SADRISTS, TOP BAATHISTS, SOME SUNNIS

13. (C) The December 16-17 political parties conference hosted by the Ministry of State for Reconciliation and National Dialogue included representatives from most political parties within the GOI, provincial governors and leaders, and a few representatives of political groups not currently involved in the political process. The conference had been postponed three times partly due to budget constraints, but mainly because conference organizers wanted to ensure participation from those both inside and outside of the political process. In the end, representatives from the Sadrist party did not attend. From the Sunni political parties, only the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) sent representatives; the Iraqi People's Conference (Adnan al-Dulaymi), National Dialogue Front (Khalaf Allayan), and Hewar (Saleh Mutlaq) did not send

anyone. The most senior IIP leaders were not present because they are accompanying VP Tariq al-Hashimi on his trip to the US.

14. (C) In conversations prior to the conference, Saad al-Muttalibi, advisor to the Minister of State for Reconciliation and National Dialogue, and Naseer al-Ani, IIP and High Commission for National Reconciliation (HCNR) member, explained that conference organizers wanted to include opposition groups in this conference. To that end, al-Muttalibi and al-Ani, accompanied by HCNR representatives and CoR members Falih al-Fayyad (Dawa) and Yunadam Kena (Assyrian Democratic Movement), traveled to Jordan, Egypt and the UAE for seventeen days beginning in October to meet with opposition groups and encourage them to participate in the conference (Ref A). The conference invited 23 people from outside of Iraq, although senior leadership from Sunni opposition groups did not attend. Syrian-based Baath party leaders were not invited because they refused to attend the conference under a different name (Ref B).

BARZANI SEEKS INCLUSION, HAKIM LAYS OUT FACTS

15. (SBU) The conference began with senior GOI officials giving speeches focused on unity, increasing political participation, and security. President Talabani did not attend the event due to illness, but through his chief-of-staff he conveyed his support for the conference and encouraged attendees to continue to work for stability and security. A summary of key speeches follows below. Prime Minister Maliki's speech was reported in Ref C.

--- KRG President Masoud Barzani (KDP) encouraged conference

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attendees to make realistic recommendations when addressing Iraq's problems. He warned that Iraq's problems can only be solved if there is full participation from all sides and that Iraqis will not accept exclusion policies or the domination of one political party making all of Iraq's decisions. He stated that federalism is key to Iraq's success. Moderate forces, Barzani said, can lead the country.

---Shi'a alliance leader Abdulaziz al-Hakim (SCIRI) outlined the eight key "facts" that define the current situation in Iraq and must be accepted if the political process is to move forward.

First, freedom and everything that results from it "cannot be relinquished" because this could mean a return to dictatorship.

Second, sectarian violence must be rejected and all Iraqis must participate in the political process.

Third, Iraq's unity gives it strength and any division of Iraq must be rejected; the principles of a federal system are assets which can unite rather than divide the country.

Fourth, Iraq's true enemies are Saddamists and takfiris. To combat terrorism there must be code of honor agreed upon by all political parties to confront terrorism.

Fifth, rule of law must be respected including the fact that government authorities are the only ones who should have weapons since they are the ones mandated to provide security.

Sixth, Iraq is an independent country and foreign interference will not be tolerated. He said Iraq will live in peace with regional neighbors at the same that they reject foreign intervention in Iraq's affairs.

Seventh, the national unity government has the responsibility to provide services to its citizens and

protect natural resources.

Eighth, administrative reform, anti-corruption measures, reconstruction projects and infrastructure development should continue in order to protect everyone's interests.

-- CoR member Salim al-Juburi (IIP), representing the Tawafuq coalition, called on political forces to include those with reservations about the political process and those who feel they have been marginalized. According to open source reporting, he listed seven requirements in order for the political parties conference to succeed:

First, militias must be disbanded and terrorists and criminal gangs confronted.

Second, displaced persons must be repatriated and forceful displacements stopped.

Third, everyone must be allowed to participate in the reconciliation process

Fourth, members of the Iraqi Security Forces who were "marginalized" or removed from their positions should be reconsidered and reinstated.

Fifth, a national balance needs to be reestablished and everyone needs to be allowed to participate.

Sixth, national resistance should be recognized and disassociated from terrorism.

Seventh, a meaningful constitutional review process should be undertaken.

OUTSIDE THE TENT: ALLAWI'S PARTY WITHDRAWS, OTHERS PROTEST

¶6. (C) Following the conference, news reports cited interviews with Hussam al-Azzawi a member of Ayad Allawi's party, the Iraqi National Accord (Wifaq). Al-Azzawi stated that the party will withdraw from all future political parties conferences because "political forces in Iraqi arena have been excluded and due to the failure to extend invitations to them to attend the conference." Safia al-Suhail, a CoR member from Allawi's Iraqiyya list, told poloff she was surprised by Wifaq's announcement stating that she "had seen Allawi yesterday (December 15)" in Amman for a three hour meeting and he had not mentioned withdrawing from

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future conferences. Hamid Majeed Mousa, Iraqiyya's CoR bloc leader and chairman of the Communist Party, told poloff that he &had been sitting next to Hussam al-Azzawi "throughout the conference had not been told that Wifaq would make this statement." (Note. While al-Suhail and Mousa both belong to the Iraqiyya alliance, they are not members of Allawi's party. The withdrawal of the Iraqi National Accord will not impact other Iraqiyya members. End Note)

¶7. (C) The conference was respectful in tone until immediately prior to the lunch recess. At that point, a Shi'a attendee claiming to represent tribal leaders asked why they had been called to Baghdad to attend a conference in which they could not participate and where all they could do was listen to speeches. A Turkomen attendee followed by shouting that while the Turkomen support the conference's concept, they condemn its program. Why, he shouted, have the Turkomen not been allowed to make a speech?

CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS: SOME WORKABLE, SOME UNREALISTIC

¶8. (SBU) Following lunch the conference attendees divided into working groups. Each group was assigned one of four

topics) constitutional review and federalism; Iraqi Security Forces and militias; De-Baathification; or expanding political participation) and asked to discuss the issue and prepare recommendations to be presented to the Prime Minister, the CoR and the Ministry of State for Reconciliation. The four groups reconvened December 17 to continue discussions and draft suggestions.

¶9. (C) According to al-Muttalibi, the working groups produced approximately 20 "workable recommendations." He said the Ministry has rejected some of the recommendations, including calls to dissolve Parliament or hold new elections, as "unrealistic." He noted that some of the recommendations will require new legislation to be passed through the Council of Representatives, while other ideas can be implemented by government decree. One of the better ideas, he said, was to facilitate distribution of pension checks to former Iraqi Army officers living abroad who might now qualify by allowing them to collect checks in Iraqi Embassies. Many of the working groups called for creating new committees to resolve issues such as de-Baathification and reinstating former IA members. In an effort to broaden political participation, one group suggested that the future national Electoral Commission consists of Commissioners not belonging to the ruling political party.

¶10. (SBU) At the end of the conference al-Suhail, the chairperson of the working group on broadening political participation read a prepared statement from the group. The recommendations included continuing to invite those not participating in the political process to future meetings and conferences, emphasized the need to review de-Baathification legislation, and expanding the HCNR to include representatives of the "parties, political forces, and figures supporting the new political process in Iraq." The HCNR has 20 members including parliamentarians, political party members, and GOI ministers with various political, ethnic, and religious affiliations. (Note: The formal recommendations from the conference have not been released. Post will report septel. End Note).

PUBLIC REACTION: WE LIKE WHAT WE HEAR, IT'S TIME TO DELIVER

¶11. (C) Ambassador of the Permanent Arab League Mission to Iraq, Mokhtar Lamani, told poloffs December 18 that he did not believe the reconciliation conference would have significant impact. Lamani defined two key problems, namely that the various political parties disagree when "diagnosing" Iraq's problems and, more significantly, they do not trust each other.

¶12. (C) Reactions from various provinces are included below. While there was support for the conference's ideas, most Iraqis noted they are waiting to see if these ideas translate into meaningful action:

--Anbar: Anbar Governor Ma'amoun Alawani and two Anbari sheikhs, including the leader of the Anbar Salvation Council Abdulsattar al-Rishawi (Ref D), attended the conference. Ma'amoun praised the overall tone of the PM's speech and pointed with approval to his comments on former Baathists. However, he appeared more interested in the conference's motion to form a committee to explore changes in the constitution than in the status of former Baathists. In general, Anbari Sunnis tend to welcome any liberalization in

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re-integrating former Baathists as a matter of Sunni solidarity, but the issue is not typically at the top of Anbari grievances towards the central government.

Al-Rishawi conveyed disapproval of the PM's comments on former Baathists. While speaking to PRToffs his body language indicated that he did not welcome a resurgence of Baathist influence as it would potentially challenge his

rising position. (Note: The difference between Ma'amoun and al-Rishawi is due to their respective positions in Anbari society. While the re-integration of former Baathists would give the provincial government much-needed capacity and managerial skills in the security forces, al-Rishawi would himself be a potential loser if former regime personalities began to assume leadership positions. End Note).

--Baghdad: PolFSN collected reactions to the conference from Baghdad district and neighborhood council members. Sabeeh al-Ka'abi (Shia), Rasheed District Council member asserted that Rasheed district residents generally believed "this conference, like the others, was useless." He asserted that the general sentiment in the district was that the conference was pure propaganda pushed forward by politicians who say one thing but thought another. He opined that the two most important people who should have been there weren't: Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS) leader Harith al-Dari(Sunni) and Muqtada al-Sadr. "As long as the activities of these two parties continue, reconciliation will never occur," he lamented. Dr. Haider Jabr Zedan (Shia) from Sadr City DAC repeated this same theme saying that without al-Sadr and al-Dari the conference was essentially useless. "To the residents of Sadr City, this conference was like any other session of CoR," he said. Dr. Haider said that remarks Adnan al-Dulaymi, leader of the General Council of Iraqi People, made at the Istanbul conference (Ref E) as well as the inflammatory statements on the part of Saudi Arabia made of mockery of any hope of reconciliation.

Three neighborhood council members, Mohammed al-Samaraii, Basil al-Kateb, and Mohammed Fathi, from the Sunni-dominated Khadra neighborhood commented separately that the conference did not represent any positive step for the government. They said that Sunnis during government formation had been promised lots of things, none of which ever materialized. "Sunnis may have leadership positions," they said, but they remain excluded from government. As a result all three agreed that the reconciliation conference was another "promise" that would reap no rewards.

--Salah ad Din: Deputy Governor Abdullah Ejabara (Sunni, former Baathist, retired General) and other contacts (all Sunni former Baathists) bemoaned that no one from Salah ad Din province had been invited to attend the conference, noting that many national-level Sunni leaders were not present and that widely popular in SaD ousted Parliamentarian Mishaan al Jabouri was reportedly denounced for sectarianism during the conference. The Deputy Governor said he does not believe any former Iraqi Army members from SaD would be re-incorporated in the new IA and that these statements were just "made for the media so it looks like something is being done." Other contacts suggested that with the careful wording of the statement, it was likely that if any group benefits it would be more Shia than Sunni. If Sunnis from SaD are re-admitted to the IA, it will likely be a very welcomed initiative in spite of the initial skepticism surrounding it.

--Babil: Ali al-Rubae, editor-in-chief of Babil's weekly newspaper, al-Fayhaa, assessed that re-enlisting former Iraqi army officers could reduce terrorism by fifty percent. Those officers, he said, have great experience which are now being used to the terrorists' advantage. However, he continued, the religious parties will not accept suspending the de-Baathification process. Ali Hassam Hamza, Babil Provincial Council member(SCIRI), said that former military officers with the rank of major and below have already been permitted to return to the army. He claimed there would be no objection to their return as long as they prove loyalty to Iraq and do not have "their hands stand with the blood of the Iraqi people."

--Ninewa: PRToff spoke with both Ninewa provincial governor, Duraid Kashmoula, and the Provincial Council Chairman, Salim Hajj Issa. Kashmoula said that he approved of the idea of reintegrating some of the former military members into the current Iraqi Security Forces. His primary concern was that any such reintegration should be coordinated with provincial

leadership. Issa was even more enthusiastic about the idea of encouraging former regime soldiers to reenter the military. He, too, emphasized the need for coordination with provincial leadership. Issa specifically noted the issues of fraudulent

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enlistment and inadequate background screening as areas that bear scrutiny.

--Qadisiyah: Saad Abdullah Madhloum, head of the Independent Electoral Committee in Diwaniyah, said most people support bringing back former army officers since they have experience, although certain higher-ranking levels should not be allowed to return. Reconsidering the entire de-Baathification process, he said, is not acceptable and will not improve the security situation. He recommended moving the de-Baathification process from a political issue) as it is now) to a legal issue addressed through the judiciary system.

--Wasit: Hazim Mihsen Yaseen al-Khudairy (Shia), head of the Iraqi Council for Peace and Solidarity, said that readmitting former Iraqi Army (IA) members was like "blowing smoke in people's eyes," for two reasons. First, he said, the PM knows that almost all new IA leaders are from the SCIRI or Da'wa parties who used to be prisoners of war, suggesting that they will not accept the return of former IA leaders. Second, al-Khudairy continued, it will be impossible for the new IA to rehire the huge number of former officers) he estimated more than 700,000 - with senior ranks. He differentiated between Baathists and Saddamists, concluding that faithful, nationalistic, "good" Baathists could be reconsidered for certain positions. When asked about the PM's statements that militia members should be absorbed into government organizations, al-Khudairy scoffed that the PM knows the militia members have already infiltrated these organizations and there is nothing he can do.

--Erbil: Local Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) press has given limited coverage to Maliki's speech, instead continuing to criticize the Iraq Study Group report. Falah Mustafa Bakir, KRG Director General for External Relations, said that the PM's speech covered "sensitive issues" and that Shia reactions to his statements need to be considered. He said de-Baathification could be reconsidered, but people who had a high rank in the army should not be reinstated. Lower ranking officers could be "re-brainwashed," he said, and allowed to serve.

--Diyala: During meetings with Senator Kerry following the conference, Governor Ra'ad al Timimi (Shia) mentioned that former Ba'athists needed to be brought back into the army and government and that this would help the security situation. Both General Ayad (Deputy Chief of Police, Sunni) and Khaled al Sanjary (Mayor of Baquba, Sunni) nodded in pleased agreement and later emphasized the point. Given their strong support in many prior conversations for bringing former Ba'athists into the mainstream their reaction was not surprising. Only Major General Hulail Hussain Shaker (Shia), leader of the Iraqi Army's 5th ID, seemed unhappy with bringing back former military leaders.

¶13. (C) Comment. This conference's success will ultimately be judged by whether the political leaders present follow through with recommendations and ideas for reconciliation raised there. Indeed, the principal problem at similar events in the past -- including those hosted by the GOI, OIC, and many other organizations -- has been a lack of follow through. A number of Embassy contacts have expressed hope that PM Maliki's speech (ref b), which laid out ideas for including former Ba'athists in the political process, could provide some new momentum. Although a number of participants pointed out that key political voices such as Shia extremist leader Moqtadda al-Sadr and Sunni hardline cleric Harith al-Dari were not present, there is also hope that through the conference the GOI has set in motion a process to broaden the

political dialogue. The second day of the conference was marred by a mass kidnapping in the Baghdad office of the Iraqi Red Crescent Society, an occurrence that reminded participants of the fundamental importance of the conference goals of unity, stability, and peace. End Comment.
SPECKHARD